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C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 005111

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [CU](#) [ETRD](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [VT](#) [UNGA](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA: HOLY SEE TAKES TRADITIONAL VIEW ON UNGA
RESOLUTION

REF: A. STATE 301451

[1](#)B. VATICAN 1406

[1](#)C. VATICAN 1775

[1](#)D. VATICAN 2071

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Brent Hardt for reason 1.5 (b) and (d)

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SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Reviewing the recent UNGA vote on the U.S. embargo on Cuba, the Holy See reaffirmed its opposition to the embargo, while affirming its distaste for the regime's human rights abuses. MFA Caribbean Affairs Office Director Giorgio Lingua repeated the Vatican's view that the embargo is ineffective, and said he hoped the U.S. would change its approach on the issue. While the Holy See is disappointed with the lack of progress on human rights and religious freedom issues almost six years after the 1998 papal visit to the island, Lingua took a long-term view in assessing the regime, noting some positive signs and adding that "Castro is not immortal." End summary.

UNGA Vote: Holy See Sees Little Effect

[1](#)2. (C) Poloff met November 7 with MFA Caribbean Affairs Office Director Giorgio Lingua to discuss the recent vote on U.S. embargo on Cuba at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) (ref A). Lingua acknowledged the EU's condemnation of Cuba's human rights situation in its explanation of vote (EOV) and noted the Holy See's distaste for such abuses. Lingua was nevertheless doubtful that the EU's statement would affect the overall situation. Lingua agreed with poloff that the UN Resolution was simply a way for Castro to deflect attention from the regime's abuses and other ills, but insisted that the U.S. was playing into Castro's hands by giving him this diversion.

Policy Change on the Horizon?

[1](#)3. (C) Lingua noted the U.S. Congressional vote last month to ease travel restrictions to Cuba. Cuba's isolation, he contended, only fortified the regime and discouraged compromise. He wondered if the move might prompt the administration to consider a change of policy on the embargo. "Bush is a strong leader who could take this step without losing status," Lingua said. After so many years of similar strategies without significant results, Lingua wondered aloud why the administration wouldn't try a new approach.

Upcoming Anniversary

[1](#)4. (C) Lingua also reflected on the upcoming sixth anniversary of Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba in January, [1](#)1998. "We had hoped for more by this time," he said, when assessing the current state of affairs for freedom of worship on the island. While the Cuban population is perhaps

subjected to fewer limitations on worship than it was six years ago, Lingua argued, this is still not freedom. The Holy See was particularly troubled by the government's restrictions on Catholic publications. Lingua said that Castro was using the Cuban bishops' refusal to comply with the regime's registration requirement for publications as an excuse for his continued persecution of the Church -- a disingenuous tactic related to the leader's use of the embargo issue.

Comment: Light at the End of the Tunnel?

15. (C) Lingua's comments reflected the Vatican's usual cautious approach to Cuba, as well as its traditional opposition to embargoes in general -- particularly this one. Overall, however, Lingua was more optimistic on Cuba than he has been in recent meetings (ref B,C,D), and took a long-term view. "Castro is not immortal," he said, noting that there are opposition figures in Cuba who are simply waiting for the right opportunity to become vocal. He further noted that he saw evidence of an increased willingness on the part of Cuban bishops to criticize Castro's regime in recent years.

16. (C) Lingua did not foresee any upcoming Holy See statements on Cuba, though he noted that when a new papal nuncio is appointed, the occasion might present the opportunity for the Vatican to make mention of Castro's human rights failings. Post will track the appointment and encourage the Holy See to do just that when the time comes. (Note: There is no word on when the new nuncio to Cuba will be named, but with a new Vatican foreign minister settling in later this month, it will likely be a few months until an appointment is made. End note).

HARDT

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